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NSC BRIEFING

28 June 1955

IMPLICATIONS OF GROWING BLOC AND
FREE WORLD NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

Since Mr. Stassen's disarmament proposals are before the Council today, it might be appropriate as background to review briefly the conclusions of our recent national estimate on the impact of increasing Bloc and Free World nuclear capabilities on public attitudes and national policies in the Communist and non-Communist worlds (NIE 100-5-55, dated 14 June 1955).

I. In the Free World public concern about nuclear warfare has increased considerably during the past year. This reaction has varied in intensity from time to time and from country to country but a few clear and powerful trends have appeared in most non-Communist countries:

a. The most important effect has been a diminishing willingness on the part of most governments and peoples to incur risks of war.

b. A second effect is to increase public desires for a reduction of international tensions and for the use of all possible means, even including those which the governments themselves consider ill-advised, to work toward a settlement with the Communist powers.

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c. A related effect is increased public pressure on governments to find some means of international disarmament, and especially some means of insuring that nuclear weapons will not be used in war.

II. As nuclear capabilities further increase, and the possibilities of mutual devastation grow, the tendencies to caution and compromise presently discernible in non-Communist countries will probably be accentuated. Aversion to risks of war, pressures for disarmament, and fear of general war, will almost certainly be more marked than now. The difficulties of conducting policy against such adversaries as the Communist leaders will probably be increased, and the chances may become greater of a weakening of the non-Communist position by successive concessions.

III. We believe that the allies of the US, and especially the major allies, will continue in the alliance despite the increase of nuclear capabilities, at least as long as general war does not appear imminent. If general war appeared imminent or actually occurred their policies would depend in large measure on the course of events. Some of the allies might have no choice, and could not remain uninvolved even if they

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wished to do so. Some might consider the issues at stake insufficiently important to risk general war, and might therefore declare themselves neutral at an early stage of the crisis. Some governments might estimate that full-scale nuclear war between the US and the USSR would end with complete or near-complete destruction of the war-making potential of both ~~nuclear~~ powers, and therefore that neutrality might be both a safe and a profitable position. If events developed in such a way as to confront governments with a clear and immediate choice between nuclear devastation and neutrality, we believe that practically all would choose neutrality.

IV. With respect to the impact of growing nuclear capabilities on Soviet policy, evidence indicates that US nuclear capabilities almost certainly constitute a major deterrent to overt military aggression by the USSR.

SOVIET LEADERS

V. Although Soviet nuclear capabilities will increase, ~~that~~ will still almost certainly remain concerned not to pursue aggressive actions to the point of incurring substantial risk of nuclear war. They ~~Soviet leaders~~

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will probably still not be confident that they could attack the US with nuclear weapons without exposing the USSR to an even more devastating counterblow.

VI. However, as Soviet capabilities grow, the Soviet leaders may come to estimate that the US, because of fear for itself or for its allies, or because of pressure by its allies, will be increasingly deterred from initiating full-scale nuclear war. They may therefore come to believe that local wars will be less likely than at present to expand into general war, and thus that superior Bloc military capabilities in certain local areas can be exercised without substantial risk of provoking general war.

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